## SECRET SOCIETIES

The family has been the strongest universal social unit in China. However, as we have seen, it has been and is but one of several types of units. Another has been the secret societies. These have played and continue to play a very important part in the life of China, probably much more so than do the numerous fraternal organizations in the United States. Often they have had an active and influential part in politics. It is estimated that to-day about half the adult males who can lay claim to any influence are members. Almost everywhere they must be reckoned with by those who would understand the life of a community.

Just how ancient are those now in existence is a matter of doubt, although some of them claim to have begun hundreds of years ago. Certainly organizations of this general type have long had a share in Chinese life. The Red Eyebrows and Yellow Turbans, prominent in civil wars in Han times, appear to have been fraternal bodies. Repeatedly in seasons of disorder others have come to the fore. Since the societies are secret, it is impossible to give a full and satisfactory account of them. Sometimes, as we have seen, they have religious features. Often they have solemn and binding vows of brotherhood, and they may have secret codes. Frequently, too, their discipline is very severe, exacting of members strict obedience to the commands of their officers. Some are to be found among the Chinese abroad and fill .a prominent role in the lives of the emigrants. Such, for example are the *tongs* among the Chinese in the United States. These *tongs,* it may be added, seem to be peculiar to Chinese colonies in America and were, perhaps, originally organizations for legal and

benevolent services to their members.

One of the most famous and powerful of the secret societies has been the *Ko Lao Hui,* or Association of Elder Brothers. It is said to have an elaborate ritual and its members are reported to take an oath of brotherhood. It is believed to have been responsible for numerous outbreaks and riots from time to time and of late years sometimes to have taken to banditry. It has been much feared and revenge visited for any violence to its members has added to the dread felt for it. Chapters of another, the Red Spears, were often started as a farmer's protective society. Then